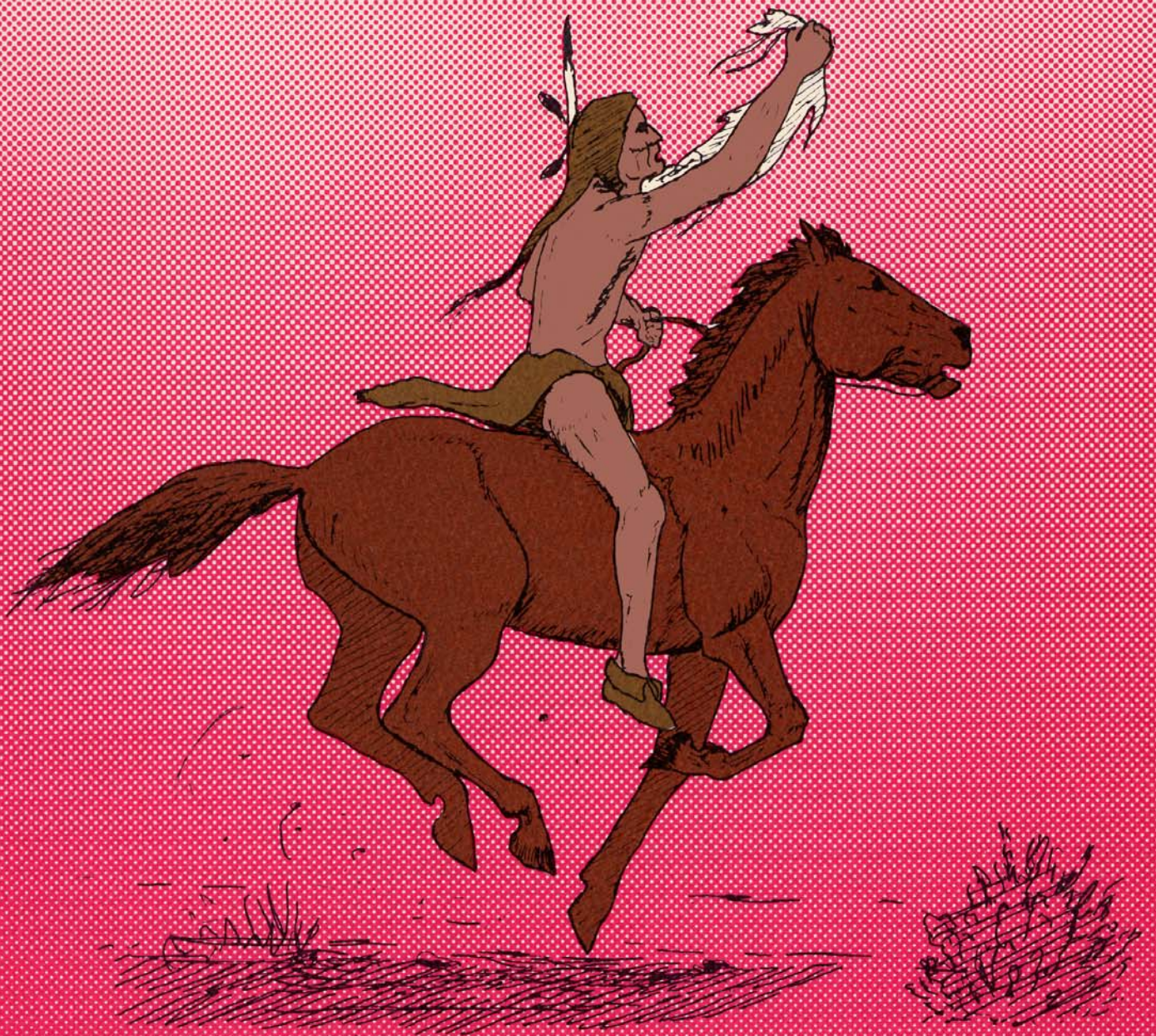


# How Horses Came To The Gros Ventre

## Red Bird's Death

The Indian Reading Series





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THE INDIAN READING SERIES  
Stories and Legends of the Northwest

## How Horses First Came To The Gros Ventre

### Red Bird's Death

Level V Book 17

By members of the Gros Ventre Elders Board  
from the Fort Belknap Reservation

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Dedicated to Raymond T. Gone, Sr.

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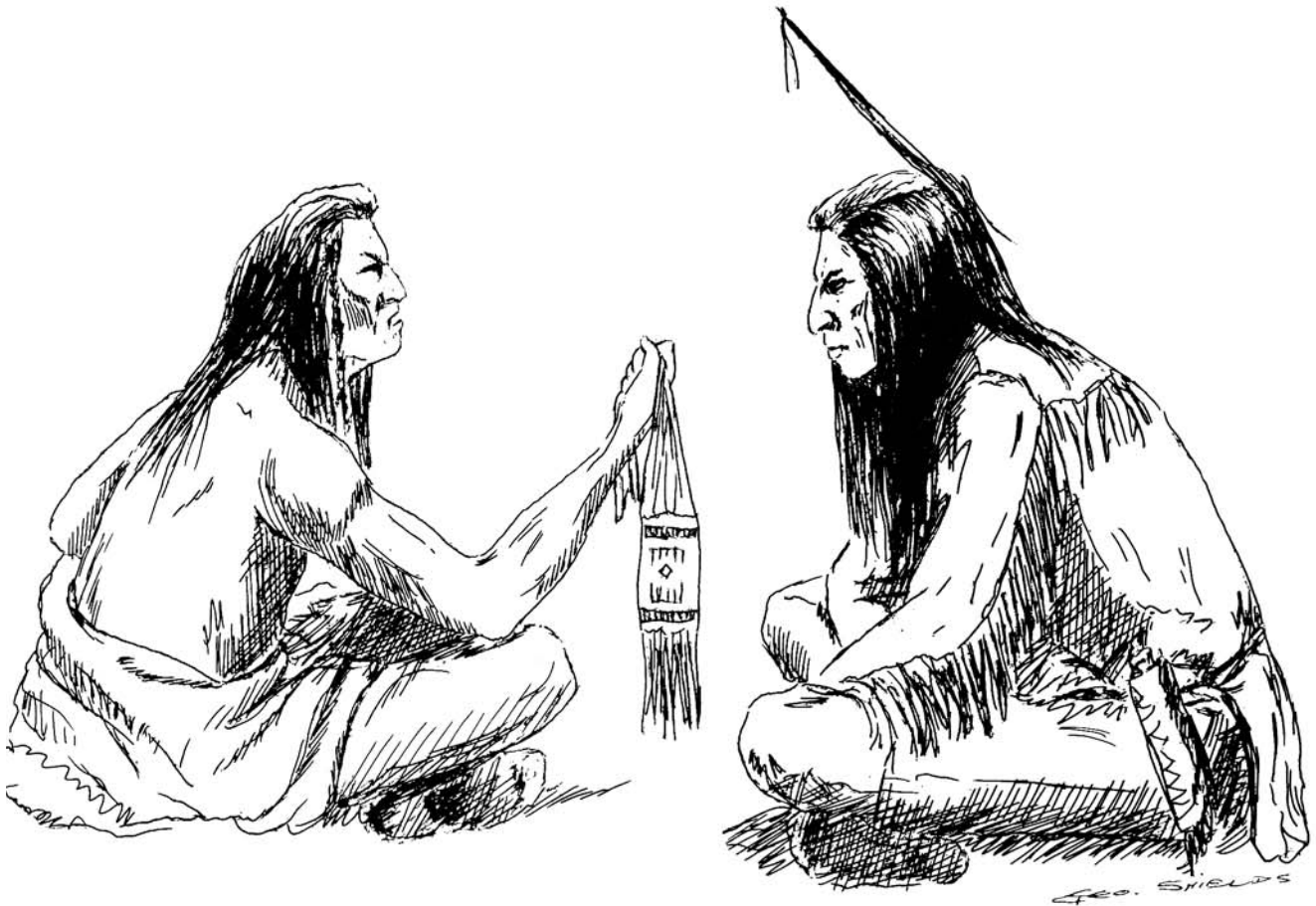
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# How Horses First Came to the Gros Ventre

Long ago, the Gros Ventre lived in the north country. This was before they had horses. They only had dogs for pack animals. At that time, the keeper of the flat pipe bundle had two sons. One was a young man and the other was just a boy. The older son had been to war and his medicine was the skin of a red otter, an unusual and powerful helper.



One time the older son went to visit some friends at a neighboring camp. While he was away, enemies attacked. The younger brother, wishing to help defend the camp, took his older brother's red otter medicine bundle and carried it into the fight. Shortly after the battle the older brother returned and noticed that his medicine bundle was missing. When he discovered that his younger brother had the bundle, he became very angry and said many mean things to him.



He told his younger brother that if he wanted a sacred medicine bundle, he should go out and get his own, like he himself had done.

The younger brother felt very sad about this. He went into the hills and prayed and cried, asking for help and guidance. His mother, seeing her son unhappy, asked him, "What is wrong, and why do you feel so bad?" He told her, "I have decided to journey to the place where my older brother received the red otter medicine, far to the East toward the rising sun." His mother told her husband about their youngest son's intentions. They both pleaded with him not to go on such a dangerous trip but their pleading was in vain. The boy's mother gave him food and extra moccasins for the trip and he started for the land of the red otter.





After traveling many days, he came to a camp of people who spoke the same language as he. They welcomed him and said they knew his father and asked many questions. He told them of his story and of his desire to find the red otter. When he left this camp, he continued traveling to the East and came to another camp where he met people who spoke his language. They too, treated the boy kindly and asked him many questions.

After leaving this camp, he came to a third camp where he was well received and questioned about his journey. When he told the story of his search for the red otter, the leader of the village told him, "You are going on a dangerous venture that many people have tried and failed. Not far to the east is a big lake where the red otter lives." The leader warned the boy again of the dangers of his search and asked him to stay with them.



The boy insisted that he must go on. The leader said, "You will come to a long slope. On the other side of the slope is the lake and on the near shore you will see a lone lodge facing the east. Do not try to enter. Ask no questions. You must sleep each night outside the lodge at the foot of a different lodge pole. As you face the door of the lodge, the first pole to your left will be the pole you start with. There are thirty poles. You must not eat or drink while you are there. You will see many bones of others who have tried and failed. If you succeed, a person will revive you. This person will ask you to bring him a bird. If you see a red bird with a white topknot, do not try to catch him. Have nothing to do with the red bird!"

The boy continued his journey and at last came to the lone lodge on the shore of the lake. During the day he would cry and pray for help. At night he slept by one of the lodge poles as he had been instructed. When he was halfway around the lodge, he became so weak that he could not stand and had to crawl from one pole to the next. By the time he reached the last three poles, he could not even crawl and had to roll from one pole to the other. He had become so weak, he could not even cry.

He made it to the last pole and the next morning he heard someone inside the lodge say, "Wife, bring in our son. He is poor, tired and weak." A woman came out and dragged him into the lodge and then around to the rear of the lodge, opposite the door. There the man doctored him and fed him. He cut some meat into four pieces and gave the pieces to the boy. Every time he would eat a piece another would appear, so there were always four. He slept inside the lodge that night but no one spoke to him.

Next morning, the old man asked, "Son, why did you sleep around my lodge? What do you want?" The boy told him his story and asked for a red otter medicine. The old man said, "That is easy, but first you must get up before sunrise and go along the shore of the lake among all of my birds. Catch one and bring it back to me. The birds are tame and will not harm you."





In the morning after the fourth night, the boy went out before sunrise. He approached the lake, heard a great noise, and saw many birds along the shore. Soon, he saw the red bird and decided to catch another but the red bird got in the way. Each time he tried to catch a bird, the red bird was always in the way. This prevented him from catching the bird he wanted. He thought, "Perhaps it is all right to catch the red bird. It is red and must go with the red otter." The boy caught it by the legs and when he did, it was as if his hands were stuck. He could not let go! The red bird flew up into the air with him, circled around, and then flew down and dropped him on an island in the middle of the lake.

The boy was alone on the island with no one to help him. When he was hungry, he ate berries, moss, plants, frogs and even clay to keep from starving. He did not lose hope and continued to pray and cry for help and power. Each day the red bird would fly over him and say, "This red-bush-berry eater is not dead yet!"



One day the boy came upon a baby water snake. He picked up the snake and took a strip of his clothing and tied it around the snake's neck. Then he let it go.

The next day, while he was wandering around the island, he heard someone singing behind him. The song was:

I am here

I am present

I am going to you.

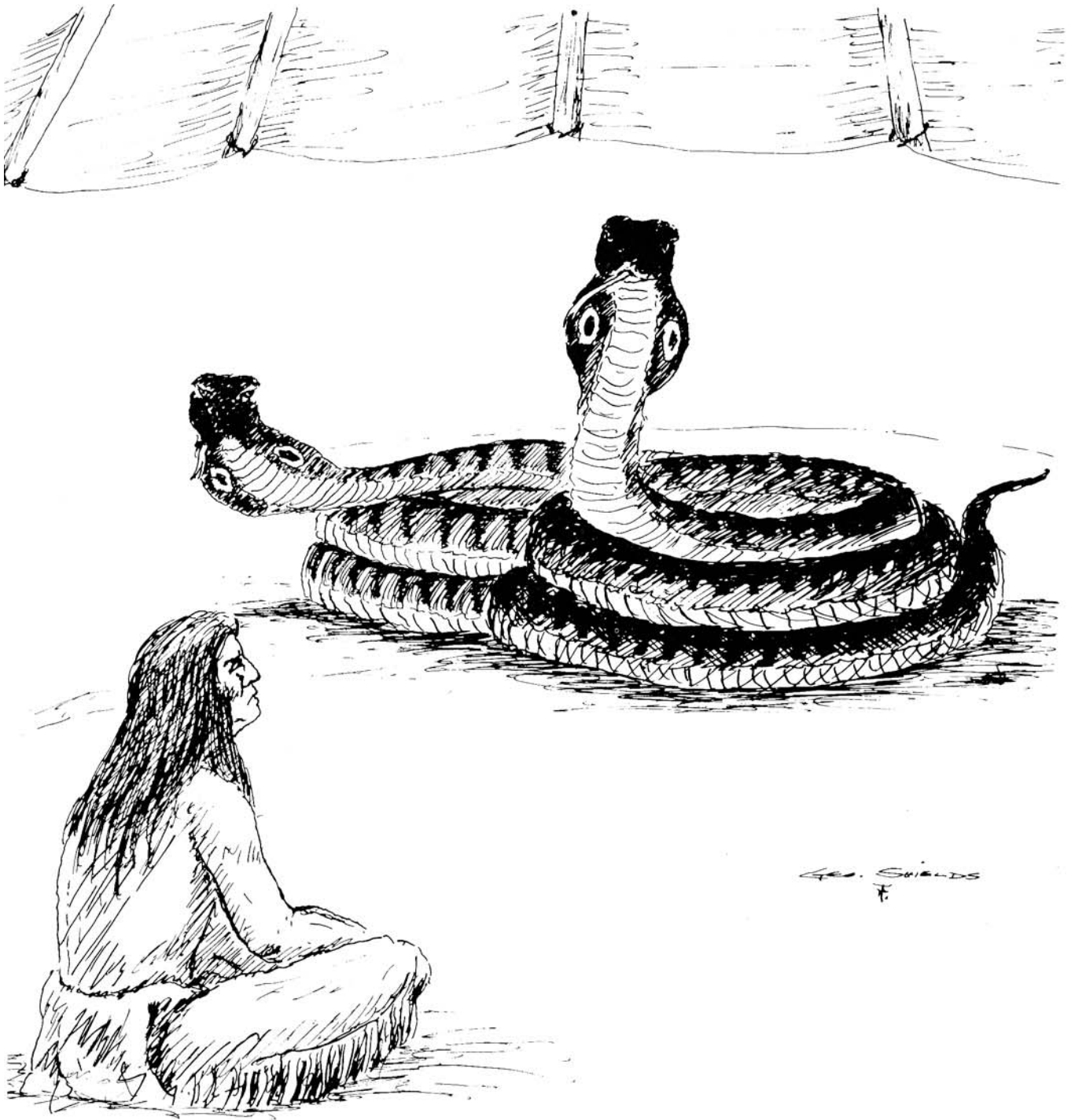
He stopped and listened. The song was sung a second time. Then the singer said, "My father wants you. He is inviting you to visit him." The boy heard the speaker repeat the song four times. But, when he turned around, he saw no one. The voice said, "Follow me." It was the little water snake still wearing the strip of clothing he had tied around its neck.



Geo. Shields  
F



The boy followed the snake into the water. After traveling a short distance, he saw a lodge with water monsters painted on the cover. As he approached the lodge, the snake said, "You took pity on me so my father will pity you. Follow his instructions carefully." The snake opened the lodge door and the boy entered. He saw two big water monsters there. One of the water monsters said, "Whoever thinks about our last born and pities him does right and is good and kind. Since you did this, we will help you." He gave the boy a rope and said, "With this rope you can overpower the red bird. When you use it, sing this song: ROPE, HAVE PITY ON ME! Sing this song as long as is necessary or as long as you wish or need to use the rope. I also give you the power to change yourself into any bird or animal you may wish to be and the power to change back to yourself again. You can change whenever you feel it is necessary."



Then the water monster said, "Get on my back, close your eyes and do not open them until I tell you to." The boy did as he was told. They began to travel through the water. When the boy heard the water monster's body scrape on the stones of the shore, he opened his eyes. He was back on the island! The boy cried out for help but the water monster said, "You should not have opened your eyes! Now I have no power to help you!"

Again, the boy wandered around the island until he saw a bald eagle on its nest. He called to the eagle, asking for his help. The eagle replied, "I pity you and will help you get home but you must do as I say. Hang onto my two outer tail feathers. Close your eyes and do not open them until I tell you to do so." The boy obeyed, grasping the two outer tail feathers and closing his eyes. The eagle flew away with him. As they touched the ground, the eagle told him to open his eyes. The boy found himself back on the shore of the lake in front of the red otter lodge.





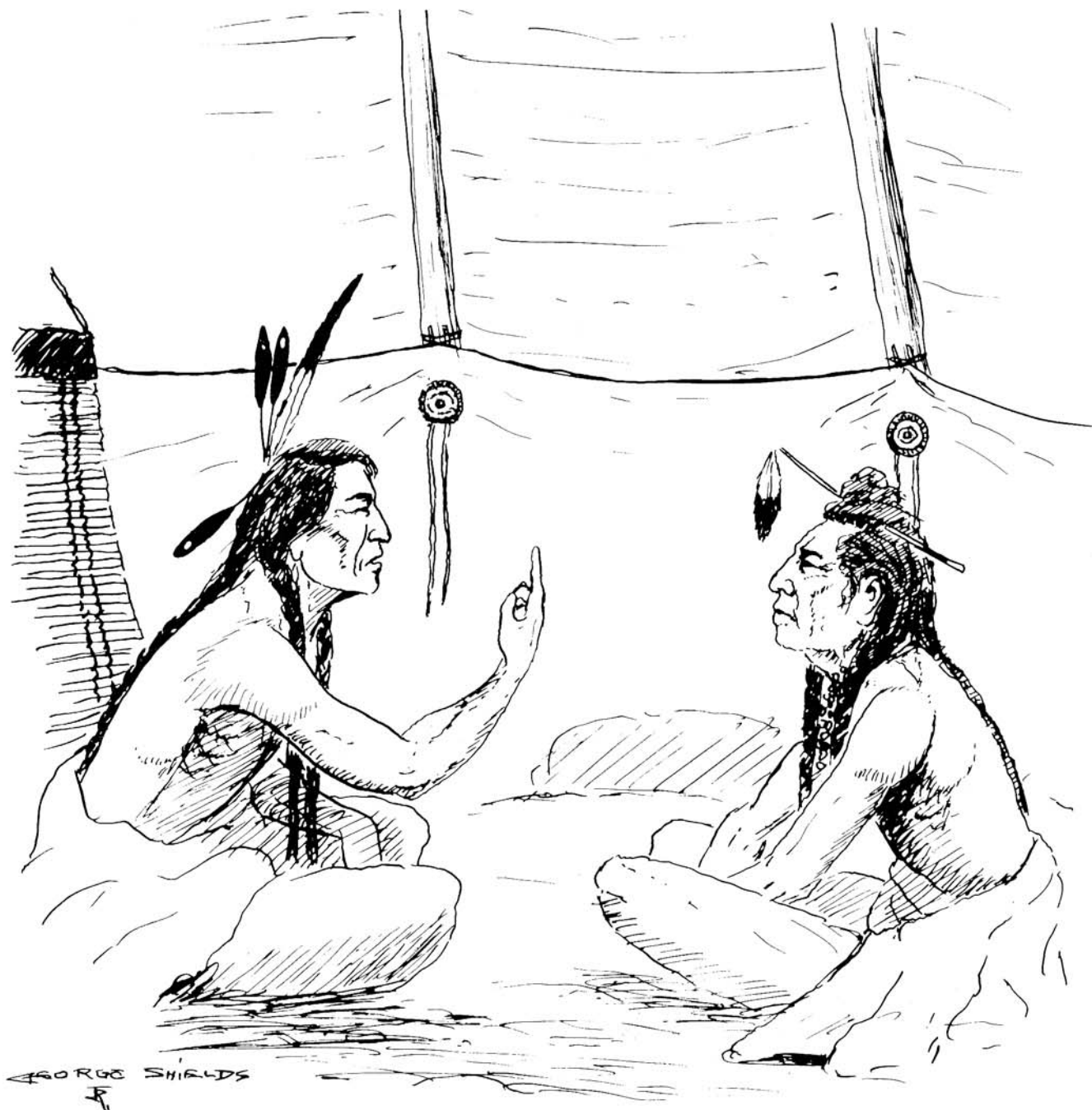


The old man who lived in the lodge was pleased to see the boy again. He gave the boy a red otter skin for his medicine bundle. The old man said to him, "You are poor, so I will give you horses. I will give you these hoof bells. Ring them and horses will come to you out of the lake. When you leave my lodge, do not look back or look at your horses for four days. When you sleep at night, sleep with your head facing in the direction you are traveling." The boy followed the old man's advice. After four nights, he came to the last camp he had visited. He turned around and saw a great herd of horses following him.

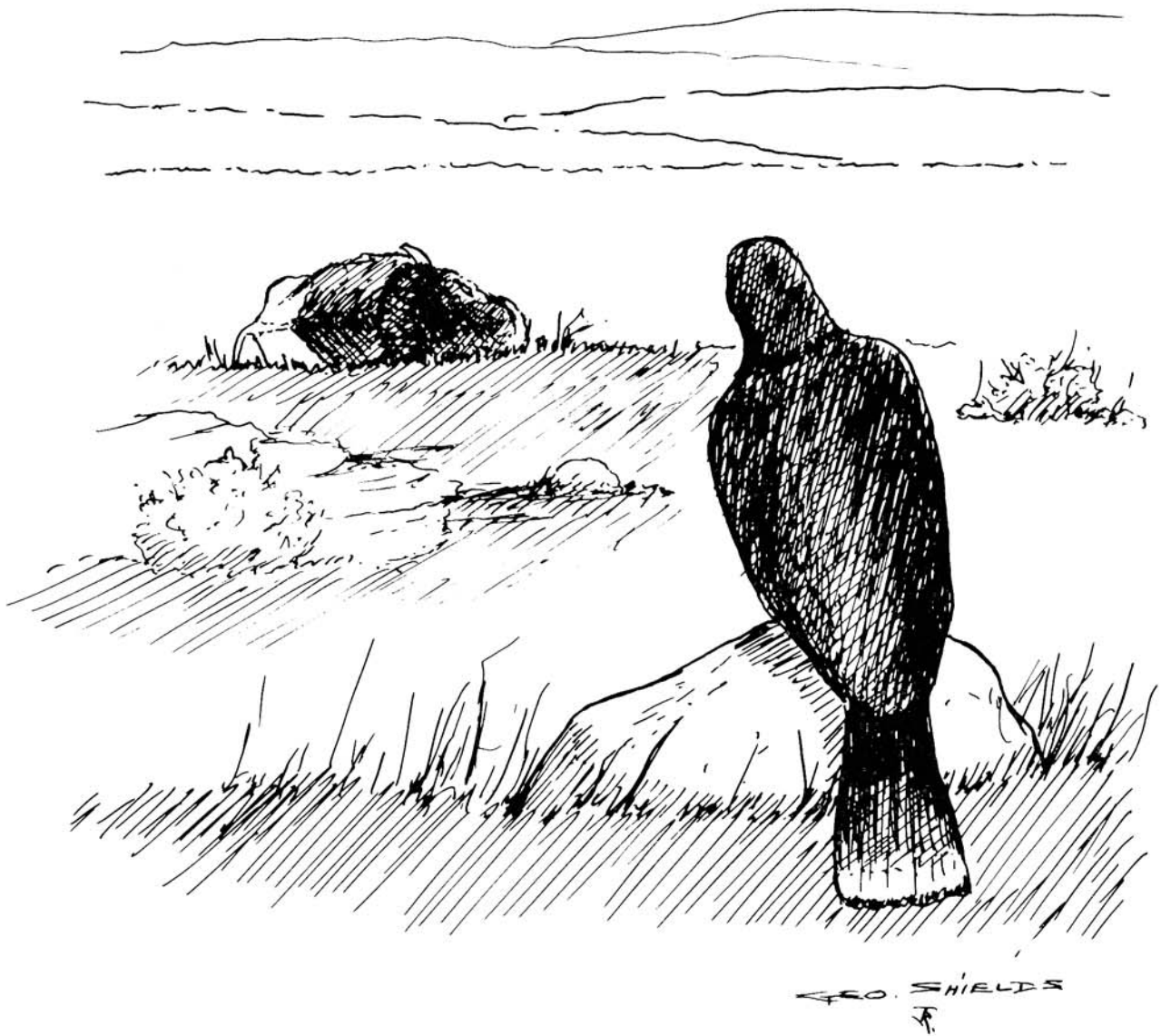
At the camp the boy told the leader, "If each person from the camp will bring a rope they can have a horse." The camp crier announced this and everyone got a horse. The boy told the people in the camp, "You must be kind to your horses and do not mistreat them." He left the camp and rattled his hoof bells so his horses would follow him. At each camp the boy visited on the way he gave the people horses. When he arrived home he still had many horses left. Everyone was glad to see him again and welcomed him back. His parents were happy to have him home and proud of what he had accomplished.

When the excitement of his return was over he told the leader, "Have each person bring a rope and I will give each a horse." Everyone in the camp received a horse except the boy's older brother. The boy did not give his brother a horse because of the mean way he had treated him when he had borrowed the red otter medicine to help defend the camp.

## Red Bird's Death



Near the end of summer the boy told his father of his experiences when he had received his red otter medicine. He said, "I have one thing left to do. I must go back and conquer the mighty red bird before I can feel that I have been successful." Late in the fall he decided to go and find the red bird. He told his parents not to worry about him while he was gone. He had strong medicine and would overcome red bird and return soon.



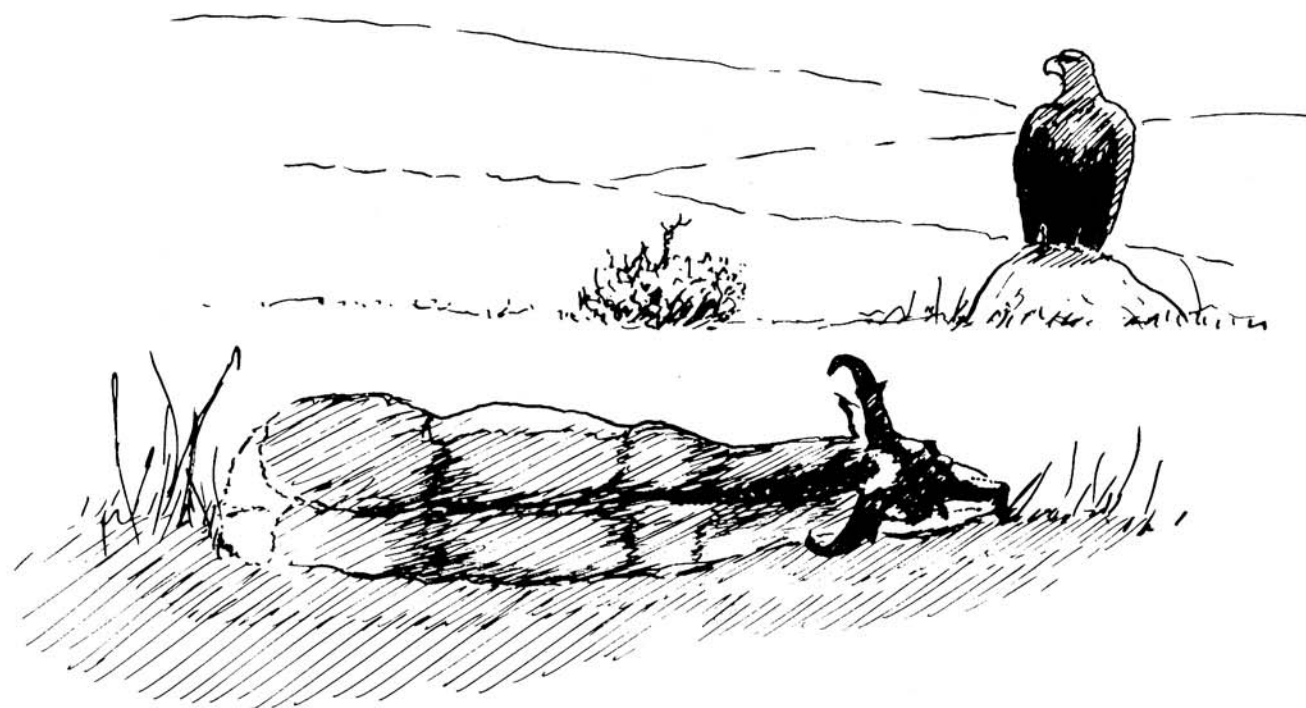
When he arrived at the lake he said, "I wish to be a dead yearling buffalo." He had been given the power to change himself into whatever he wished to be. He became a dead yearling buffalo. Many kinds of birds came and feasted on his body. At last the red bird came but he lit a short distance away. After watching for a time he flew over the dead buffalo and said, "There is my friend the red-bush-berry eater trying to trap me." He flew away.





GEO. SHIELDS  
A

Next, the boy turned himself into a fat dead elk and the same thing happened.



GEO. SHIELDS  
J

Then he became a fat dead antelope and again the red bird recognized him.

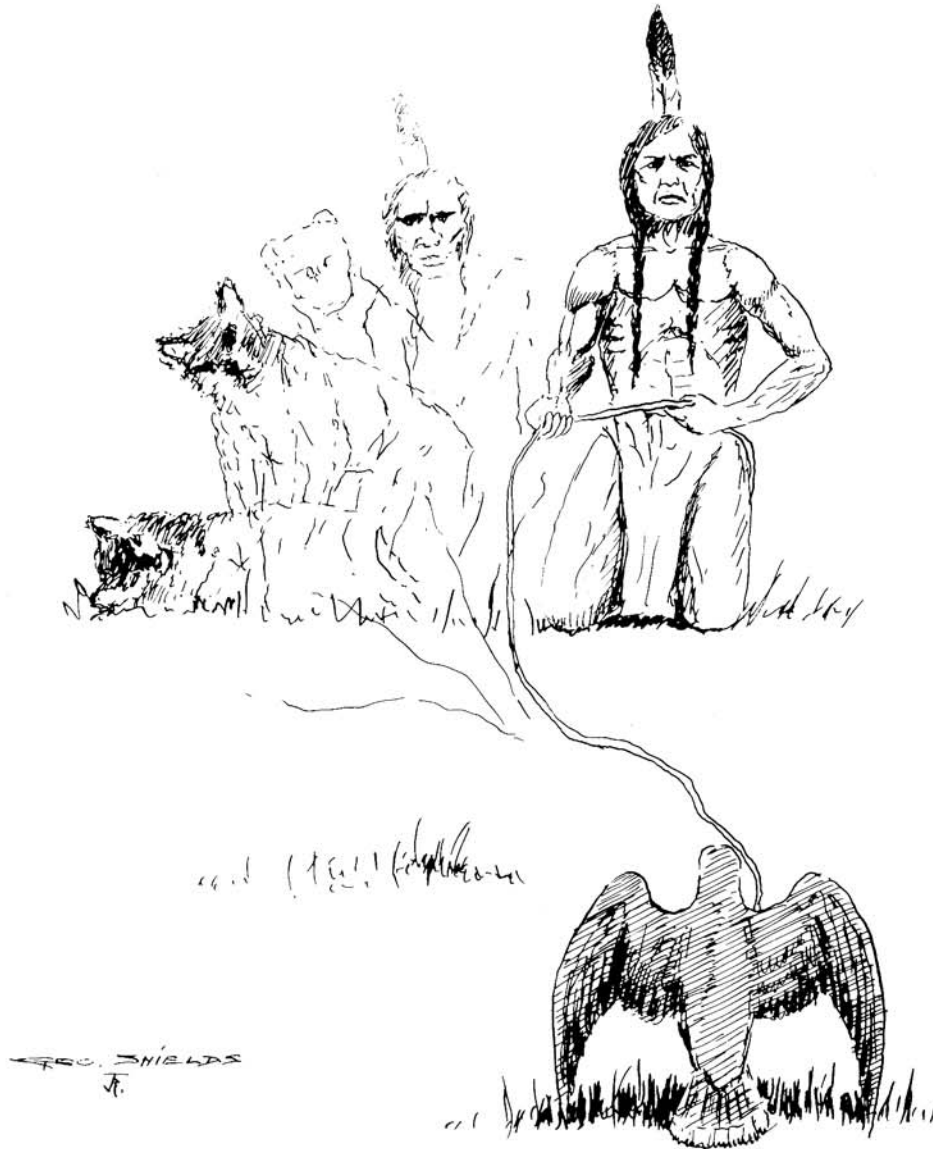


GEO. SHIELDS  
F.

On the fourth try he thought a fat dead wolf would be good because all of the birds like it. This time before he changed himself into a dead wolf he placed a medicine rope that had been given to him by the old man on the ground nearby.



Many birds came to feast on the dead wolf and soon the red bird appeared, landing on the downwind side. He came close but stopped just outside of the rope and said to another bird, "Throw me a nice piece of fat." The bird threw the piece of fat but it landed inside of the rope. The red bird picked up the fat, smelled it and then said, "That is my friend red-bush-  
berry eater! You can't fool me!"



But it was too late. He was already caught by the medicine rope. The boy transformed himself back to his person form, jumped up and started to sing his rope song. He sang this song over and over again while making the motions of pulling on a rope. When he saw that the bird was close enough he made the motions of throwing the bird down. There the red bird was, caught in the rope at his feet! He did not know how to overcome the red bird but decided to pull out all of his feathers. When he had done this and the red bird was naked the boy taunted him saying, "If you are powerful do something now!"

The red bird just shook himself and was covered with feathers again. He tried to fly away but was still caught in the rope. The boy pulled him back again and removed all of his feathers. This happened four times and then the red bird was helpless. He had no more power to restore his feathers. The boy said to him, "You did not pity me when I needed help. Now I do not pity you." He left the red bird to freeze when the weather turned cold.







This boy became a great man and was always successful in whatever he attempted to do. The two songs that he received he gave to the flat pipe and they were sung at the end of the ceremony when the flat pipe bundle was opened. The people today believe that the lake where the red otter medicine was received is Devil's Lake in North Dakota. It is named "Old Woman's Lodge."

Booklets available in the Level IV sequence are listed below. Numbers refer to the Planned Sequence of use in the *Teacher's Manual*. Materials developed by these tribes and others in the Northwest are included in the Levels I, II and III sequences.

1. *Warm Springs Animal Stories*  
The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs  
Reservation of Oregon
2. *Snail Women at Sq<sup>3</sup>a'le*  
The Suquamish Tribe of the Port Madison  
Reservation
3. *Blue Jay – Star Child/Basket Woman*  
Muckleshoot Tribe
4. *Assiniboine Woman Making Grease*  
Assiniboine Tribe of the Fort Peck Reservation
5. *Coyote*  
The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs  
Reservation of Oregon
6. *How the Summer Season Came*  
Assiniboine Tribe of the Fort Belknap  
Reservation
7. *Little Weasel's Dream*  
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead  
Reservation
8. *Fort Hall Stories*  
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall  
Reservation
9. *The Bear Teepee*  
Northern Cheyenne Tribe
10. *Sioux Stories and Legends*  
Sioux Tribe of the Fort Peck Reservation
11. *Kootenai Stories*  
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead  
Reservation
12. *Chief Mountain's Medicine*  
Gros Ventre Tribe from the Fort Belknap  
Reservation
13. *Coyote the Trickster*  
Burns Paiute Reservation
14. *Running Free*  
Shoalwater Bay
15. *Salish Coyote Stories*  
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead  
Reservation
16. *Coyote and the Cowboys*  
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall  
Reservation
17. *Napi's Journey*  
Blackfeet Tribe
18. *Warm Springs Stories*  
The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs  
Reservation of Oregon
19. *Teepee Making*  
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead  
Reservation
20. *Baskets and Canoes*  
Skokomish Tribe
21. *Warrior People*  
Blackfeet Tribe



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